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AN

EPISCOPAL CHARGE,

ON THE

SUBJECT OF REVIVALS,

DELIVERED BEFORE THE FORTY-EIGHTH CONVENTION

OF THE

DIOCESE OF PENNSYLVANIA,

AND

ADDRESSED

TO THE

Clerical members of the Convention.

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AN EPISCOPAL CHARGE, &c.

REVEREND BRETHREN,

It may seem extraordinary, that having, in the last Convention, agreeably to a provision to the effect, superseded a sermon from one of the presbyters of the diocese, by the delivery of a charge, I should so soon exercise the same discretionary privilege. The reason is, that in my official character, I may deliver my opinions, on a subject at all times important; but rendered especially so, at the present time, and in a few preceding years, by its possessing of an extraordinary degree of interest in the public mind. My views of it, are the result of the most serious consideration; not without prayer to the Father of Lights, for his holy guidance. The subject is what passes under the name of Revivals.

On every occasion of an extensive sensibility of this description, there is brought a heavy responsibility on the consciences of the ministers of the Gospel; who ought, of all men, to be the most cautious of making light of a serious concern for the things of eternity; and yet of countenancing extravagances, which not only bring the subject into contempt, but in general maintain only a short lived influence over the persons on whom they act. At such a crisis as that contemplated, there cannot but be a correspondent obligation on us, to give a proper direction to the excitement; and to be prepared for the calls, which, if there be confidence in our fidelity, will be made on us; bearing the impress of great variety of character, of condition, of age, and of measure of information; in cases which cannot but come under our notice, and require the aid of our counsels.

It is not improbable, that in the existing incitement, there is a reaction on the irreligion by which a period preceding, and not distant, had been distinguished. The most of us may remember the time, when there stood forth to the world a widely spread confederacy against religion in every shape; and when gigantic measures were in operation for its destruction. The result, was an illustration of the prophecy concerning the Messiah—"the Rulers take counsel together

against the Lord and against his anointed ;" the decree standing still firm—"yet have I set my King upon my holy hill of Zion."

While, in some instances, wickedness of so monstrous a grade extended its arm from seats of public authority, the poison of its infidelity was insinuated from the retreats of science, over the extent of Christendom ; not only as in former ages, to the moral loss of those to whom were open the stores of perverted literature ; but to that of many in the ordinary classes of society ; unfitting them for the duties of private and domestic life ; to the ruin of themselves and of their families. It is this, which is here conceived of, as having caused an alarm at the dreadful consequences in prospect, so as at present to have produced a reaction, and what is thought to be a ground of profitable remark.

That at any time, and in any country, in the course of providence, there may be circumstances producing a more than common attention to the momentous truths of eternity, is what cannot be doubted of, by any informed of the transactions of past ages ; especially as they have a bearing on the concerns of the Christian Church. It must be equally notorious, that in every such season of sensibility, there occur instances, not only of its being perverted from its proper object, but of its administering to error in a great variety of ways ; aggravating the evils, which have their origin sometimes in the frailties, and sometimes in the sinful passions of our nature. Hence the importance of the exercise of religious discretion, lest, while on the one hand, we bear our testimony to a rational and evangelical faith, we treat the extravagances engrafted on it with levity, and without condescension to human weakness ; endangering the bringing of discredit on their kindred truths. On the contrary we should call to mind, as circumstances may require, such instructions as that, to "bear one another's burthens," as that, to "hold up the hands which hang down and the feeble knees," and as that, to "instruct with meekness them that oppose themselves." Even under the Law, the high priest was reminded by the sacrifices, which were "alike for himself as for the people," that he was "compassed with infirmities:" a lesson which should apply with an increase of weight, to the ministry under the Gospel.

There being, during a religious excitement, the alternate danger referred to, it cannot but open an extensive field for the labours of every minister ; with an admonition against the want of affection for the work, and against remissness in the conducting of it. We read in Scripture, that "while men sleep, the enemy sows tares." The intimation was designed for labourers in the gospel harvest ; who ought to perceive, in the abundance of the promised crop, a proportionate call for their zeal and for their endeavours.

It is intended to present some general maxims; susceptible of being so accommodated to particular occasions, as to favour the view of the subject which has been disclosed.

I. The first maxim, and that which enters the most materially into the question of the merits of a Revival, is the necessity of distinguishing the affections which, on Scriptural grounds, may be ascribed to the Holy Spirit; from any emotions resolvable into the actings of the animal economy; and which may or may not be accompaniments of those endowments of a higher character.

There is no truth of Scripture more conspicuous, or more abundantly spread over its contents, than that of the agency of the Holy Spirit on the human mind; and of its being the efficient cause of whatever is a conforming to the standard of divine perfection. By nature, we are utterly destitute of religious affections; and they can no otherwise be incited in us, than by an agency of which there was a manifestation to the senses on a day of Pentecost, as recorded in the Acts of the Apostles; but which, in its ordinary influences, was operative from the day of the apostacy, and will be so to the end of time; being the only possible cause of what comes under the description of holy disposition or desire. This representation is warranted, as by many places in Scripture, so especially where it defines "the fruit of the spirit to be in all goodness and righteousness and truth." When we look for the sense of our church, she is seen to be on no point more evangelical than when she affirms, that "by this holy inspiration we think those things that are good, and by this merciful guiding we perform the same;" and again, that from the same source, "all holy desires, all good counsels, and all just works proceed." It follows, that if there be excited in any person a sense of the evil of sin, a wish to be delivered from its thralldom, a drawing of the mind to high and heavenly things, a correct estimate of the world, contrasted with an enduring state, the felicities of which religion opens to our hopes, and which may even now be ours by anticipation; these are movements, for the cultivation of which in ourselves, and for the promoting of them in others, we are under the heaviest responsibility to the great Being who is "the giver of every good and perfect gift." But this influence of the Holy Spirit, can be known only by a settled habit of the affections; and is not at all dependent on, or to be tested by, the sensibilities of the animal part of us.

It is not denied, that such sensibilities may be concurrent with holy exercises; and that at times, they will assuredly be so, in a greater or in a less degree. This may be perceived in the effects produced by the charms of music, by certain intonations of the human voice, by affecting narratives, and by other circumstances, either resorted to for the purpose, or

interesting the mind unexpectedly. Under this head, there may be mentioned the power of sympathy, as possessing a mighty influence. The enumerated causes may be instrumental to religious affections, but cannot constitute them, or be the measure of their grade. To the mind so moved, it may be a cause of lively satisfaction, but is not ascribable to the operation of the Holy Spirit. To this point, it is impossible to produce any authority from the Holy Scriptures; and, what ought especially to forbid the affecting of any such use of them, is the notorious fact, that no form of devotion can be more entirely divested of it, than the prayer which our Lord has prescribed to his followers; as well to be put up by them in the appointed words, as to be a model of whatever other prayers there may be occasion for, suited to circumstances of time and place.

It will naturally be expected, that by the introduction of the present point, there has been induced the expediency of delivering an opinion concerning those extreme excitements of mind, and those violent agitations of various members of the body, which are thought to characterize Revivals, and to aid in the extension of them. According to the distinction laid down, they may or they may not be coincident with holy desire, and with other evidence of the work of grace. In themselves, they are no part of it, but are very much dependent on natural constitution, especially the nervous part of the system; on the sound or the unsound state of the body, and even on the temperature of the atmosphere. This is the reason, that in persons advocating so mistaken a test of the operations of the Holy Spirit, there is commonly much fluctuation between joy and sorrow, between hope and fear, between reliance on the promises of the divine word, and the apprehension of the weight of its threatenings. The alternation is erroneously resolved into the movements of the divine mind; God being supposed to "hide his face" at some times, and to "lift up the light of his countenance" at others. Such expressions, when they occur in the Old Testament—for they are not to be found in the New—uniformly signify temporal calamity and temporal prosperity. In spiritual concerns, God is always the undiminished source of blessedness; and if, at any time, we feel ourselves beyond the sphere of the enjoyment of it, there can be no rational cause of this, except in the consciousness either of our sins or of our frailties. It is analogous to what we see in the material world, where the sun is always the same resplendent luminary; and if he be sometimes seen imperfectly from the earth, the cause is in the exhalations generated from her bosom.

Of Revivals in the sense here objected to, there are some advocates, who, while they affirm of animal excitements to a certain extent, that they are the operation of the Holy Spirit,

censure the so frequent issues of them, in vociferation, in gesture, and in extravagance of discourse. What is here contended for, is that the whole view of the subject is unsound; that animal sensibility is not in the least degree a test of grace; and that although it may combine with devotion, this rests on other grounds of evidence of its being genuine and acceptable on the terms of the Gospel covenant.

An effectual expedient for the distinguishing between a religious direction of the affections, manifesting their heavenly origin, and the species of sensibility which makes a false claim to the same, it is but to compare the customary effusions of the latter, with the devotional compositions handed down to us in the Holy Scriptures; and to remark in these, the entire absence of whatever can come under the head of passion. The Lord's Prayer has been already noticed to this effect. The temperature characterizing it, may be seen in the only two other social prayers contained in the New Testament. They are that of the eleven apostles, preparatory to the choice of a successor to the traitor Judas, and that of the same sacred body, on returning after their being questioned by the Sanhedrim. If any occasions can claim the being clothed with extraordinary importance, they are such as these: and yet, if either of the prayers produced by them, should be uttered in the manner adopted for the forwarding of what sometimes goes under the name of Revival; the incongruity of the sentiments and of their accompaniments, would be manifest to every person present. As for the Lord's Prayer, it is far from being in constant use among the favourers of the extravagances noticed; and when used, it has been remarked of the deliverers of it, that they are constrained by consistency and decorum, to a greater moderation of voice and of action, than had been put forth in the body of the exercise. In the Old Testament, there is much of a devotional strain, but of a temperate cast. It pervades the Book of Psalms, and helps to account for the prevailing propensity to make that book give way to a superabundant use of hymns. Used they may be with profit, in due measure and under a correct choice. But in the vast field opened under the name, there is given an opportunity of making a selection of compositions, breathing a spirit which can find no precedent in the Book of Psalms, the words of inspiration not coming up to the species of excitement aimed at. In short, if we would look into Scripture for any thing resembling what sometimes accompanies the exhibitions here faulted, we must be indebted for it to the priests of Baal; whose devotions, if they are to be estimated by their degree of ardour, are pre-eminent over that presented to the true God, by his prophet Elijah. Similar use might be made of adoration continuing to be offered to heathen gods, down to the present day; of which a notable instance, is in the enthusiasm attendant on the self-sacrifices annually offered to the idol Jug-

gernaut. In the two cases, however different the objects of worship, the attendant sensibilities are the same.

Hitherto, the remarks made have principally applied to the exercises of prayer. But, they are equally true of preaching. Whether the object be information of the understanding, or persuasion intended to be attractive of the affections; that is, of such as issue in the graces called for by the Gospel; nothing can be less congenial to them, than the extreme ardour, which is so much called into display for the excitement of Revivals, and for the keeping of them to what is thought the proper height of animal sensibility. It is but to revolve in our minds such an address as that of St. Peter to the Jews, upbraiding them with the crucifixion of their Messiah; or that of St. Stephen to the same people, ending with his reproaching of them on the same subject; or any of the addresses of St. Paul, whether we take that on Mars Hill in Athens, or that to Agrippa and Festus delivered before the judgment seat; or that to a popular assembly, when he was rescued from their rage by the chief captain Lysias; to convince us, that on each of these occasions, the vehemence in question would have been out of place; not aiding, but disparaging to the cause in which it would have been employed.

It is frequently remarked, and is not denied, that on the decline of the effervescence of a Revival, and after large displays of the numbers said to have been converted by it, and to be the subjects of saving grace, it never fails to happen, that the far greater number become lost to the feelings which had possessed them. To this it is commonly answered, that there is always a proportion, who remain true to their profession; and it is inferred, that to hold in light esteem even this measure of good achieved, is to oppose the work of God.

This presents a question, on which it is not easy to speak definitively; because the matter at issue is not truth on one side and error on the other; and because the result will vary, according to the different experiences of those who have been observant of it. The fact cannot be denied, that of the subjects of such awakenings, there are very many, who, on detecting the extravagances of them, are carried to the extreme of infidelity, or at best to the resolving of their former frames into the potent force of sympathy. Thus they become fortified against those calls of the Gospel, which may be complied with in perfect freedom from the danger of delusion. But they shrink from them, as tending to renew the deceptive views, from which, as they think, they are happily delivered. Who shall calculate how many, from this cause, are finally lost to the kingdom of God in this world and in the next? The consequence described is especially observable in those, whose early time of life had subjected them to an entanglement, from which they have become relieved by mature years, and by

better informed judgments; but not without the greater danger of their never becoming the continuing subjects of saving grace. To these considerations let it be added—still with the allowance of the different experiences of different persons—that of those who persevere in a profession which had its beginning in a conversion not wrought by rational motive, and not consonant with what the gospel offers to the effect, there is a proportion, in whom a pharisaical outside is a cover for grievous delinquencies in temper and in practice; and this, not always from intentional hypocrisy, but often from mistaken views of a gracious state, laying more stress on temporary feeling than on the habitual bent of the affections; and divesting even grievous sin of the odium due to its malignity. In fine, whatever proportion there may remain, after these great deductions, of those who “adorn the doctrine of their God and Saviour,” we know that the Holy Spirit of God is not limited as to the persons, or as to the means of bringing home sinners to himself; a work, which is sometimes accomplished by what are usually called accidental occurrences; and sometimes by the agency of men, whose mouths, like that of wicked Balaam, have been made the vehicles of salutary truth. In addition to all these considerations, it ought not to be overlooked, that the kingdom of the Redeemer is in part extended, by means, compared by himself to seed sown on the ground, which “springs and grows up,” the sower “knoweth not how,” but which does not attract public attention like Revivals.

In the confounding of the working of animal sensibility with the operations of the Holy Spirit, one of the most remarkable instances of inconsistency, is the overlooking of the opposite purposes, of which the latter agency is affirmed, by bodies materially differing in their views of evangelical truth, but all equally confident, that such extraordinary interpositions are for the verifying of their respective theories. “The outpourings of the Holy Spirit,” “the sensible manifestations of the divine presence,” and the like terms, are currently applied to the subject, with certain bodies of professors. These attestations, such as they are, go directly to the abolishing of the sacraments of the Christian church; and yet, with other descriptions of professors, are the corroboratives of preachments, in which those ordinances are considered as binding together the body of the faithful. The universality of the design of the propitiatory sacrifice of the cross, is proclaimed with similar appeals to a divine agency; while it is claimed with equal confidence, by those who reject that doctrine, as derogatory to the sovereignty of God. If there should be exhibited to the public eye, from the records of former times, and from narratives of the transactions of the present, the effects of the power of sympathy in opposite directions; yet in

alliance with religious sensibility spread over popular assemblies, acting on persons equally sincere, and all characterized by the same species of extravagance, but by various and important discriminations as to the ends to which they are severally aimed; there could not be a more valid proof of the error of calling that the work of God, or the outpouring of his Spirit, or the visible manifestation of his presence; which, in its beginning, in its progress, and in its decline, shows so much of the influence of sensations, originating in properties peculiar to our present frail tenements of clay. When an infidel hears such extravagances likened to the event of Pentecost, nothing can be more natural to him than the thought, that this, like the other, was an illusion of the imaginations of the persons present, generated by the power of sympathy.*

II. After the prominent maxim which has been propounded, the next shall be, that in the favouring and the increasing of religious feeling, it should be by a zeal divested of whatever can come under the name of angry passion; which is not necessary either to the sincerity of the profession, or to the depth of the interest to be taken in the success of the cause. It has been often the subject of remark and of regret, that many, on being awakened from lives of insensibility to religion, or perhaps of devotedness to gross sin, exhibit, as one of the first fruits of it, such intemperance in argument, as cannot be ascribed to any other cause than that "wrath of man which worketh not the righteousness of God." It is true, that we are enjoined by St. Peter, "earnestly to contend for the faith once delivered to the saints." But, setting aside the unscriptural fancies, which are often and naturally entertained by noviciates, and are sometimes laid aside on mature experience, it ought to occur, that if the truths of the gospel should ever so clearly countenance the causes of contention, they may suffer from the unsuitable language and manner in which they are inculcated. Hence it is, that the same St. Peter, instructing believers to be "always ready to give a reason of the hope that is in them," requires that it be "with meekness

* Relatively to excesses of animal sensibility, there is a point which ought not to be spoken of without reserve. It respects a danger, growing out of the least suspected frailties of our nature. Such is our animal organization, that on the excitement of its sensibilities of any particular cast, it is thrown into a state, susceptible of sensibilities of a different and even of an opposite sort. The remark may be illustrated in the liveliness of feeling, when, religion out of the question, there is quick passage from joy to sorrow, or from hope to fear, or from friendship to hatred, or from cruel anger to subdued humanity; or under each head, to an interchange of action. On no other ground than this, can there be accounted for the fact, that so many young persons, after manifesting enthusiastic fervours, and when there was nothing to justify the charge of hypocrisy, have undergone sudden transitions, not always stopping short of deviation from morality.

and fear :” with meekness, as opposed to causeless or to excessive anger ; and with fear, that the cause of God may suffer, from the faulty excitement, or from the indiscretion of its advocate. St. Paul also instructs us, to “ show all meekness to all men.” And when St. James speaks of “ receiving with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save our souls,” it cannot be, but that the disposition suited to its reception, ought to stamp the character of the display of it, for the instruction or for the persuasion of our fellow men. Every degree of ardour, which sets at nought these rules of christian duty, must at best be what is spoken of in Scripture as “ a zeal not according to knowledge ;” and it is well, if it be not a worm in the flower of an incipient profession, under which there will be an early withering and decay.

III. Another maxim is, that to denominate a popular excitement a work of grace, it is necessary that the effects of it should be generally permanent. There should be, not merely for a time, and while the occasion is made an object of general attention, but habitually, an increased attendance on the ordinances of religion, with suitable lives and conversation. After an extensive interest taken in the weighty concerns of religion, if there be a speedy lapse to indifference, and especially if it be to a state of less caution than before against sinful living, in proportion as this is the result, there is probability that the former effervescences were of the animal part of the subjects of them ; perhaps combining with consent to religious truth, but not giving to it a renovating influence over the inward man.

Under all circumstances there will be individuals, whose short-lived piety will illustrate the saying of one of the prophets—“ your goodness is as a morning cloud, and as the early dew that soon passeth away :” such being often the issue, even when the short-lived impressions are genuine in their source, and in their operation. But the position now maintained and held to be a salutary caution against deceptive appearances is, that in the event of a general decline from what were hailed as the promise of a christian state of heart and a christian course of life, there is reason to believe, that from the beginning, the parties had misunderstood the real origin of their sensibilities ; and that instead of there having been holy desire, sanctioned by the judgment, and impressing its sacred character on the settled bent of the affections, there was never, with the mass of apparent converts, any thing more than an undisciplined play of imagination on the animal spirits, and on other humours of the body. When, in different vicinities, there was preached the Christian faith by the early heralds of it, their successes began, not with multitudes drawn together by novelty and dwindling with the decay of it ; but,

in every case with a few followers, gradually swelling into a church conspicuous for its numbers.

IV. Another maxim to be presented, is, that it ought to be considered as essential to what can properly be called a revival of religion, with the understanding of its being on the plan of the evangelical dispensation, that the truths of the system should be the prominent heads of instruction and of edification, with those who take the lead in the excitement. How far the intermixture of some degree of error may be consistent with the propagating of fundamental truth, is a point which will be judged of with diffidence, by every person who makes due allowance for the fallibility of the human understanding, and for the difficulty of drawing the line between the issues of misled sincerity, and those of the corruption of the heart. An apostle has conceded, that instead of "gold, silver, and precious stones," figurative of salutary doctrine, there may be built on "the foundation other than which no man can lay, wood, hay, and stubble," the suggestions of human infirmity. The foundation is declared to be "Jesus Christ," with the implication of all the attributes of his character, disclosed to us in the word of truth. His first preaching, of which all his subsequent discourses were enlargements, with persuasions suited to their weighty senses, was to "repent and believe the Gospel." Repentance supposes the sense of sin, and lies at the root of evangelical obedience. This can only be the fruit of faith in the propitiatory sacrifice of the cross, offered by the adorable Author of our holy religion: which constitutes salvation an act of grace, independent on any merits of the recipient of the benefit. If further development of the point be required, let it suffice to refer to the Apostles' Creed; which, in the earliest ages of the Christian Church, was held to be a sufficient summary of all the truths accounted necessary to the integrity of the Christian faith. Although afterwards, in various times and places, there have been enlargements of the standards of Christian orthodoxy; yet when reasonable, they challenge our concurrence, not as adding to revealed truth, but as fences for the guarding of it against the intrusion of error.

It seems to have been, in former times, an effect of religious impression on the popular mind, that independently on what can properly be brought under the charge of heresy, there have been extravagances, on which we may not improperly bestow the character of will worship; binding on the conscience some dogmas and some practices, by which the word of God has not bound it: in some instances consistently with good intentions, but always, more or less, to the disparagement of the sacred cause of truth. This happened in the age of the delivery of the Gospel, and in the times immediately following, as appears in ancient documents. The same took

place in England, on the occasion of the reformation of the church of that country. It redounds greatly to her honour, that during the agitations into which the minds of men were then thrown, she steered her well prepared bark between the discarded errors which had been bound on her by a corrupt and oppressive usurpation; and others, which would have been excrescences fastened on her by modern and unsound innovation. May God grant, that the same wise management may distinguish her offspring in the United States; so that in giving increase of weight to any popular movement promising the promotion of piety, it may be by measures well weighed, and agreeable to "the truth as it is in Jesus," so as to maintain the medium, conspicuous in the institutions of her venerable parent, between superstition on one hand, and enthusiasm on the other.

V. Another mark of a genuine Revival, is its being in agreement with that grace of the Christian System, which binds believers together in ecclesiastical union. This is a prominent sense of the word "Charity," as used in the New Testament. For instance St. Paul, in the first verse of the eighth chapter of the Epistle to the Romans, where he says—"knowledge puffeth up, but charity edifieth," intends the position of this point, as appears from his going on to trace the influence of the principle on a question, concerning which, according to his opinion, Christians might differ without breach of the bond of brotherly affection. In the 13th chapter of the first Epistle to the Corinthians, he is diffusive in his commendations of the same grace; concluding with a comparative view of it, in reference to Faith and Hope, that "the greatest of the three is Charity." For the understanding of the whole chapter, it is necessary to remark its being a continuation of the argument in that immediately preceding; in which there had been discussed the claims of different spiritual gifts, as to their bearings on the edification of the church. It is, therefore, as affirming a more beneficial influence in this particular point of view, that there is constructed the brilliant argument of the apostle in favour of Charity; which seems to have been in some measure merged in the admiration of gifts more showy, but less contributing to the object. To the same purpose, is the admonition of the same apostle to the Colossians, where he tells them—"above all these things put on Charity, which is the bond of perfectness." He had been extolling the liberal spirit of the Christian dispensation, in its binding together of Greek and Jew, of circumcision and uncircumcision, of barbarian, Scythian, bond and free, in the same communion. He goes on to inculcate an extensive circle of Christian graces; and it is then, that he introduces the passage cited to the point—the recognising of Charity as a ligature, binding all the others to the person. For "above all," is in this place the

same with "over all." It is therefore a bond, and is properly called "the bond of perfectness:" there being nothing else wanting, for the consummating of the Christian character and of its attainments.

From the premises it may be inferred, that in estimating the worth of the revival of religious feelings, it should be held essential, that they contribute to the peace of the communion within which they have become active; it being possessed of just claims, and especially, that the appearances of them must be deceptive, when, in a church unquestionably "built on the foundation of the holy apostles and prophets," there is generated unnecessary strife, and there are sown seeds of unnecessary controversy and disunion, to the utter disregard of the caution against such a spirit—"God is not the author of confusion, but of peace, as in all churches of the saints."

Although, in certain places which have been cited, charity has an appropriate application to ecclesiastical union; there are other places, in which, without such a special reference, it embraces all the social offices; dictating "as we have opportunity to do good to all men;" bearing with their infirmities, and forbearing from what may injure them in their interests or in their reputation, or even be unnecessarily wounding to their feelings. All this, therefore, is included in the subject; especially to the disallowance of uncharitable censures, and of misconstruction of words and of actions. Such improprieties may accompany a specious show of Godliness; and may even put in the claim of a high grade of it; while their source is in those frailties of nature, which are consistent with "the not knowing what manner of spirit we are of."

VI. The last maxim which shall be introduced, is the tendency of a truly Scriptural Revival, to the humility of the persons visited by it. That it must needs cherish humility in our relation to God, is clearly a consequence of its bringing of us before him in the character of sinners; according to which, the only hope of salvation is in the reception of it as the fruit of undeserved mercy. Can this be, without its producing of a modest carriage in the sight of men? Let it be acknowledged, that even from a new convert, there may be occasions for the yielding of his testimony to those great truths of religion, which are becoming to him "the power of God unto salvation." But it should be under control of the admonition already referred to, exacting "meekness and fear." It may happen, that individuals shall act in contrariety to this reasonable limit of their zeal, without cause of impeachment of the subjects of a Revival generally. But when on the minds of the many, there is the taint of self satisfaction; when there are manifested claims to an extraordinary measure of sanctity, when young persons arrogate to themselves a degree of au-

thority scarcely due to their seniors, as well in years as in the Christian profession; and when there is every where the desire of being thought teachers, while there has hardly been time to establish the character of learners; under such circumstances, we ought to perceive clear evidence, not only of the unfounded claims of the individuals, but that the incitement of which they are the subjects, is delusive.

After this exhibition of the qualifications which should adorn, or rather which should give body and substance to an extraordinary instance of popular interest taken in the weighty concerns of religion, it may be profitable, and cannot but be suitable to the present design, that there should be suggested to the clergy a proper use of such a season of sensibility; as well in their public ministrations, as in the parochial intercourse of their respective cures.

On the exercises of the pulpit, there should be the stamp of the present exigency; sometimes, perhaps, in discussions professedly on the prominent questions of the day, but more generally by indirect intimations to the same effect, seasoned with spiritual and practical applications; not wearing the form of controversy, while they may be clothed with powerful claims on the understandings, on the consciences, and on the affections of the hearers. Now is the time—it is indeed always the time, but especially so at the crisis contemplated—to guard against the grievous fault often charged on our pulpits, sometimes it is to be feared with reason, but not seldom unjustly, and with a view to exaltation of party and of self; that our sermons are limited to moral duties, and that they are rested by us on grounds more congenial to the philosophy of paganism, than to a dispensation which suits its requirements to the sinfulness of human nature, to the absolute impossibility of our rising above our natural condition, otherwise than by the grace of God giving us a good will, and working with us when we have a good will; to the utter incongruity of arrogating any merit to ourselves, disparaging the only ground of acceptance in the mercy of God through Christ, the fruit of his meritorious sacrifice, and laid hold on by faith, not combining with works, although in itself lively, and manifested in “works good and profitable to men.” These are truths, which, under all possible circumstances, are essential to the giving of a vivifying influence to Christian preaching; so that, if they are named in connexion with the occurrences of the day, it is because these especially require them, for the confirming of convictions of sin, for the assuring of pardon to penitence, and for pointing out, to all the sincere, the only mean by which they can “make their calling and their election sure.” Faithful ministers of the Gospel, by such an accommodation to the various casts of character of the seekers after “the pearl of great price,” will be fulfilling the descrip-

tion given of them by their divine Master, where he compares them to "an householder, who bringeth forth out of his treasures things new and old."

To what extent the instructions of the pulpit should be carried, beyond the days especially appointed for them by the Church, is a question to be determined on by the christian prudence of every pastor of a congregation: relatively to it, there are considerations having bearings in opposite directions. On the one hand, there may be either an extraordinary destitution of a knowledge of the great truths of religion, or the inroads of errors, requiring to be guarded against without delay. And on the other hand, there may be imperious calls of secular occupations on the parishioners, preventing their attendance in such numbers, as might be alleged to be the dictate of duty; and to guard against the charge of manifesting disrespect to opportunities religiously bestowed. It may also happen, that a too frequent preaching shall impinge on pastoral duties, constantly occurring; and on the care, with which addresses from the pulpit should be prepared.

This seems a proper opportunity of noticing a distinction which is often overlooked, on the question of the comparative importance of sermons, and of the prayers and the praises of religious assemblies. That the latter are what ought to be the more prominent object of attention, is not only fairly deducible from the relations in which we stand to the great Creator and Preserver of men, but may seem to have been provided for in the New Testament, by directions more specific than any which are intended of uninspired instruction. But here is a point, which may be pushed to an extreme. If our congregations, nominally christian, could be supposed to consist of persons, who, with no, or with few exceptions, give evidence of having their minds fixed on the sacred exercises, it might justify a very limited attention, to the subjects brought before them from the pulpit. But, when it is considered concerning an ordinary congregation, how great a proportion of them are they, who, after having been made Christians in baptism, have either been educated in an entire disengagement from the obligation induced by the transaction, or have renounced it in their maturity, and are in a state no better than that of those whom St. Paul described as "aliens from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world;" it gives to the exercises of the pulpit a greater degree of comparative importance, than what might perhaps be otherwise due to them. This is a consideration, which should press on the mind of a Christian minister at all times. And if, in a season of religious excitement, the consequence should be in such persons, through the instrumentality of popular addresses and conversation, an awakened sensibility to the dangerous condition in which they are living, it should

give a seasoning to the said exercises, and should clothe them with an efficacy calculated to call sinners from the error of their ways.

Whether congregational assemblings be restricted to the returns of Sunday, or they be extended in accommodation to an existing crisis; and whether the exercises be conducted under the name of sermons, or under that of lectures; let no one conceive of what is now said, that it is designed to invite the attendants, or any portion of them, to avail themselves of such occasions for the disclosing of their spiritual states, and for the narrating of exercises which should remain in secrecy; with the single exception of communication under the seal of confidence, and with a view to private counsel. The other course is but another form of the fault of praying at the corners of streets, so pointedly censured by our Saviour. While no one will pretend, that there is in Scripture any warrant for such displays, or any examples of them; our knowledge of human nature ought to suggest to us the apprehension; and it is confirmed to those who have possessed considerable opportunities of observation, that this is a door at which there cannot fail to enter the intrusions of self-complacency and self-exaltation, issuing in that species of hypocrisy, which can cover malignant passion under language taken from religious theory; at first, perhaps, prompted by feeling, but continued by the mere force of habit. Ambition is a crafty principle, not seldom concealing its dangerous character from the person in whose breast its fire is kindled. But whether it point his view to a station of political eminence, or to an extraordinary grade of saintship, it is the same as to the unworthy arts by which it accomplishes or pursues its purposes.

It will not be foreign to the present design, to say a few words relatively to social prayer, at other times, and in other places, than those especially contemplated by the rubrics of the church. There would be unfaithfulness to the most sacred of trusts, if there should be hesitation to express the opinion, that on the conscience of an officiating minister of this church, there should rest the obligation of performing the public service in the way prescribed by her, without any discrimination as to time and place. The disregard of her salutary provisions, and the substitution of devotions which have little or no resemblance of them, will always tend, as heretofore, to the withdrawing of her members from her communion; or at least, to lower in their estimation her doctrines and her worship. It is a natural consequence; since there will be resolved into a wanton exercise of authority, the restraining to forms implied to be less edifying than those which private discretion is seen to conceive and to utter.

The opinion now expressed, is of occasions to which there is the access of all descriptions of persons. In regard to the

whole of our service, it does not exactly apply to a select company, associated for any useful purpose, perhaps for mutual counsel, bottomed on personal confidence. Yet the spirit of what has been delivered applies even here, especially as interdicting what is of an opposite character, and tends to an opposite result.

It must be acknowledged to be an imperfection, as well of prayers sent up by assemblies consisting of persons of various characters, as of discourses addressed to them, that while there may be individuals, whose peculiar states of mind may not be reached by any thing that has been delivered, an opportune sentiment may have an effect, like that on the king of Israel, of an arrow from a bow drawn at a venture. And sometimes the case of a hearer is so exactly met by what has fallen from a preacher, that he has been suspected of personality, when nothing was further from his thoughts. These are happy results, but not to be counted on.

In what way then is the imperfection of public instruction to be supplied? It is by personal intercourse, through the medium of confidential disclosure to a minister of the Gospel; or, if the party so incline, to some other religious person, of the state of his or of her mind, in an inquiry after the way of salvation. This is agreeable to what we promised in ordination, when we answered to the question exacting public and private monitions and exhortations, "as well to the sick as to the whole within our cures, as need should require, and occasion should be given." Here is a qualification, not to be so interpreted as to prevent the seeking of occasion when it can be done within the bounds of Christian prudence, and of the probability of being useful. But it falls short of such obtrusive invasions of the rights of domestic life, and of the freedom of private consciences, as are commonly repulsive; fall short of the promised benefit; and are not supported by any precept, or by any example in the Holy Scriptures.

Here is a work which may be pronounced to be the most important of all which ought to rest on the conscience of the pastor of a congregation, for which he should be at all times prepared, should be easy of access, and should be within his cure, except in the case of a weighty cause of temporary absence. On all these points, his conduct should be a refutation of the reproach often cast on his profession, that the labours of it are only those of the Lord's day; the rest of the week being spent in festivity, or in needless excursions, or perhaps in the less censurable employment of literary application. Even the last mentioned, however justifiable and praiseworthy, within reasonable limits, and especially so far as it may qualify for the opening of "the whole counsel of God," becomes excessive and sinful, when it is indulged in to the withholding

of the bread of life from any who may be hungering for it, or to the neglect of any active duty of the pastoral care.

Although this is a branch of the ministerial character applicable to all times, yet it is pre-eminently so in seasons of serious impressions on the popular mind. In such an exigency, a pastor may have to suit his counsels to some who, although born and educated within the Christian church, are without the knowledge of the first principles of the oracles of God; to others whose inquiries are impeded by doubts, which have their origin in an incipient seriousness, after lives hitherto spent with insensibility to subjects, at last opening on them in the full weight of their importance; to others who are bowed down under the sense of their sins, with such mistaken views of the Gospel, as to question the possibility of their being interested in them; and to omit many casts of character of inquirers sincere in their desires, but standing in need of direction to the only source of lasting satisfaction; to others who, under the excitement of mere animal sensibilities, think them the signs of grace and the measure of the grade of it; but ought to receive admonitions in the spirit of that of St. Paul, "let him who thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall." It is a crisis big with anxiety, when a minister of the Gospel finds himself under the responsibility attached to any one of the exigencies referred to, or to the like. And while he is now reminded of the care constantly incumbent on him, of being what our Saviour has taught him he should be, "a scribe ready instructed in the kingdom of God," let him also be aware of what will be the result of the passing opportunity on his own securing of the approbatory sentence, "well done good and faithful servant."

The address shall conclude with a brief statement of certain uses of the present subject, interesting alike to the laity as to the clergy, and intended to guard against levity and irreligion; which are often the counteraction of the misdirected ardour, attendant on what are called revivals.

1st. These extraordinary excitements may correct the error of those, who conceive of religion, as of a principle not necessary to the governing of human conduct. They imagine, that it may be committed to such motives as are suggested by a prudent balance of opposite tendencies, in their bearings on the present safety and satisfactions of the agents. But they may be assured, that there is something in human nature, responding to the calls raised to it from the Gospel, and waiting only for a suitable state of mind, and suitable circumstances, to sound alarms which shall be irresistible. This property may be compared to those substances which lie quiescent under the surface of the earth; until, by contact with the atmosphere, their awful properties are brought into action. The analogous principle of the human character, hitherto kept dormant

by the cares or by the enjoyments of the present life, may be rendered operative on the persons referred to, by some unexpected occurrences, or by their witnessing of its potency on others, acting through the influence of sympathy on themselves. When they contemplate the extravagances of which such excitements may be the cause, it ought to be a motive, in addition to motives of a higher nature, now to permit the season of revival to have its legitimate influence in the generating of the affections substantially religious; evidenced in such a profession of religion, as is agreeable to truth and soberness. Even if there should be no such result on themselves; let them at least, in what passes under their notice, recognise a principle of human nature, as certain as any other property either of the mind or of the body; and like them all, manifesting itself in results interesting to individuals and to the community.

2nd. A second use of the subject, common to all, is the giving of a due scope to religious sensibilities, put into motion by any such popular excitement as that which has been now considered. Whatever or however great may be the extravagances, to which, from the want of a proper direction, it may give occasion; every inward intimation of estrangement from our heavenly Father, is from himself, through the agency of his Holy Spirit; for the improvement of which we are responsible to his great tribunal. Such sensibilities are the best cultivated and made productive of their proper fruit, in silence and retirement; although there may be needed and there may be sought the counsels of those, who, having already trod the ways of Zion, must be supposed to be informed of their encouragements and of their dangers. Whatever savours of ostentation, is a temptation and a snare. But this should be no hindrance of a modest profession; since, while with the heart, man believeth unto righteousness; it must be, that “with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.”

3d. The last intended use is the excellency of religion in its genuine character, however liable to be dishonoured by many operations and by many practices, which have not either reason or scripture to recommend them. A counterfeit always supposes the reality of the object of which it is the semblance. Accordingly, however, these two matters may occasionally be confounded; it will remain invariably true, that agreeably to a strict translation of a text to be cited from the Old Testament—“the fear of God, and the keeping of his commandment, is the whole of man;” meaning, as he should be in himself and in all his relations; and that in the estimation of the New Testament, the end of “the grace of God to all men,” agreeably to the proper order of the words, is “its teaching of them, that denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, they should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present

world." This is the path on which, as is said in Scripture, there is "shed a light that shineth more and more unto the perfect day."

Brethren: it is bordering on the half of a century, since the date of the incipient measures of your bishop, for the organizing of our church out of the wreck of the revolution. On the principles detailed in this charge, he has acted during that long tract of time, and in the preceding years of his ministry, not without the sense of his high responsibility on the subject. Under the weight of the same, he delivers his opinions in this form; that they may be on record, and perhaps have a degree of weight after the short remainder of his participation in your counsels. It is this, which must be his apology for the so long occupying of the attention of his reverend brethren of the clergy, of the other members of the Convention, and of the audience generally.

WM. WHITE.

